

**EAST GERMAN REFUGEES**

**April 1959**

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Over three million persons have left East Germany for West Berlin or West Germany since the Communist takeover in 1945. This steady flow of population westward refutes in the strongest possible terms the claims of the East German regime that its ideas and leaders have been accepted by the East German people. The fact that many refugees have abandoned relatives, homes, farms, professional clientele and standing, and have fled west with only the possessions they could carry with them is an indication of the strength of the motives which have influenced them. The immediate reasons for flight vary with the individual refugee, but the two most significant factors in the decision are detestation of the Communist regime and greater economic opportunity in the West.

From the point of view of numbers alone the refugee loss is a serious blow to East Germany. Before World War II the part of Germany which is now East Germany had a population of 16.7 million. An influx of refugees from the east raised the population to 19,066,000 in 1948. Since 1949 the population has declined steadily and is now estimated at 17,400,000. The loss is due to the escapees whose numbers exceed the natural increase in the population.

The refugee exodus has had a more serious social and economic effect upon East Germany than the figures for the total emigration indicate. Considered by occupation, the highest percentage of refugees are in the industry and handicraft group. Their loss has proved a serious impediment to the USSR's efforts to Sovietize the East German economy through the expansion of its heavy industry. Furthermore, the high percentage of men in the emigration has had a deteriorating effect upon a population already suffering from an unfavorable age-sex distribution as the result of the war.

The East German regime has attempted to stop the refugee flow by means of persuasion, border controls and, more recently, by reprisals. These efforts have not been successful. The refugee flight continues.

#### **Reasons for Flight**

The principal reasons for flight are the unpopularity of the regime and the greater economic opportunity in the West. Specific acts by the regime temporarily affect the flow. The repression of the workers' revolt of June 1953 and the more stringent communization measures adopted at the Fifth Party

Congress in July 1958 resulted in an increased number of refugees. However, the most significant fact about the emigration is the high figure which has been maintained over a period of 10 years in spite of the efforts of the regime to stop it by persuasion or threats.

Reasons for flight vary with the individual refugee. The most compelling reason appears to be the lack of personal freedom and the fears and frustration engendered by the efforts of the regime to control every facet of existence. A doctor and his wife, who is also a doctor, and their children were among the recent refugees in West Berlin. In an interview, he said, "We are doctors....Recently they (the Communists) have put on such pressure that it is impossible to continue to practice without giving up every ethical standard a doctor believes in....Every possible pressure is being put on physicians to join the Party. We resisted, because we knew that once we joined we would be subject to Party discipline. We would be forced to report all conversations of our colleagues and of our patients. We would have to take precious time from our professional duties to attend political education meetings, Party meetings and political self-criticism meetings." His wife added that the East German Ministry of Health has ordered that "the diagnosis of a physician must reflect his political responsibility."

The future of their children and religious pressure also had a part in the couple's decision to flee. The wife said, "We are Catholics....The schools teach...that the Church is the enemy of the State and they teach the children to report every anti-Communist word they hear....And how could we continue to oppose the atheistic, state-istic teachings of the Communist schools? We knew it was time to leave."

Another doctor, a known anti-Communist, fled with his wife, daughter, and mother-in-law, after a patient tipped him off that the secret police intended to arrest him. The doctor's story illustrates the plight of many professional men in East Germany. After 25 years of practice in the same community, he had decided to abandon his property, medical instruments and savings. He said that the Communists, recognizing that he was a trusted and respected member of the community, put pressure on him to join the state clinic, attend political meetings and sign declarations against the West. He refused, and in addition did not allow his daughter to join the Free (Communist) German Youth but encouraged her to be confirmed in the Church rather than the Communist ceremony. At an interview in West Berlin, he said, "I got into trouble again when I treated a patient and found he had gotten food poisoning from a sausage that he

had bought in the state food store. As usual, I wrote in my diagnosis where the poisoning came from. The next day an official came to see me and demanded that I change my diagnosis. I refused to do it. It became harder and harder for me to carry on my practice because doctors in private practice could not get the same deliveries of medicine and equipment as the state clinics."

A distinguished educator, Professor Josef Haemel, head rector of Jena University, declared that he had fled because, "My inner convictions did not allow me to share the guilt of guiding my school towards the completely alien ideas of their so-called socialism." According to one professor, a recent refugee, every university class is secretly monitored by informers of Communist youth organizations. Party officials are informed if the lecturer changes the prepared text. Many teachers give as their reasons for flight the political content they are forced to put into their courses and the time they must spend on organized political demonstrations and meetings instead of academic work.

Lack of religious freedom motivates many people to flee. One such case is that of an electrical engineer and his family from Saxony. The man was in business and was doing well, but some months ago he began to run into difficulties. He was a member of Jehovah's Witnesses. The authorities did not interfere directly with his religious practices, but put pressure upon him and his employees in various ways. The tax examiners spent more and more time over his books, the police took him into custody for prolonged questioning, and his house was searched. After this, the engineer made his decision to leave his home and business and begin a new life in West Germany.

Among young people, many escapees flee to avoid compulsory service in East Germany's armed forces. A 17-year-old forestry student said, "I had to get out. I wasn't going to stay and be in the East German Army, and bow and scrape to those..." Many students leave because they are not accepted by Soviet Zone universities for political reasons. Others flee because of the new program under which East German high school students seeking higher education must first put in two years in the Army or one year on a state-run farm or factory. Still others resent the regime's attempts to indoctrinate them with Communist ideology and to force them into membership in Party youth organizations.

The higher standard of living in West Germany attracts many refugees. Frau Maria Sack, a refugee with her husband and 12 children, said, "Our future will not be an easy one,

but we will live better than in the east, where you can't trust your best friend." Thousands of workers and small businessmen who resent the regimentation and political pressure exercised by the Party have sought relief in a new life in the West. One young man who had worked as an animal trainer with a traveling circus in East Germany, said that he had lost his job as the result of his refusal to join the Party. It was then that he decided to cross over to West Berlin.

Many of the 79,000 farmers among the refugees have left because of constant drives for increased agricultural quotas and pressure put upon them to join collective farms. The regime has employed both propaganda and coercive measures in its efforts to push collectivization and, as a result, many independent farmers have preferred to abandon their farms and flee to the West.

#### Results of Emigration

The results of the flood of refugees to the West are unfortunate for East Germany politically, economically and demographically. The 10-year migration is an unmistakable rejection of the Communist system and its East German leaders. The rejection is all the more impressive because it comes principally from workers and youth, the two groups which theoretically have most to gain under the Communists.

Economically, the loss of hundreds of thousands of workers and farmers has proved a serious impediment to East German recovery. Dedicated to the expansion of industry in accordance with the Soviet over-all plan for the satellite empire, the regime recently has had to cut back production goals of the Second Five Year Plan. The revision is due at least in part to the lack of trained manpower and the disruptive effect of the workers' flight. In agriculture the loss of thousands of farmers and the abandonment of their farms has aggravated the problems brought on by forced collectivization. East Germany, a fertile agricultural area which before the war exported food, is now forced to import food in order to feed its people.

The flight of professional men and intellectuals has resulted in a serious lack of teachers at all levels and of doctors. The shortage of doctors is so severe that the authorities have called in Polish and Czech doctors to staff East German hospitals. Some research institutions have closed for lack of scientific workers.

#### Role of West Berlin

The majority of refugees use West Berlin as their escape route from the Soviet Zone. The following table shows the percentage of refugees who are estimated to have exited by way of

West Berlin from 1954 to 1958:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1954	63
1955	59
1956	57
1957	46
1958	69

The increase in 1958 over 1957 is presumably due to the efforts of the East German authorities to tighten border controls between the Zone and West Germany and to their refusal to grant permission to visit in West Germany. But even without this assist from the East German regime, the accessibility of West Berlin insures its importance as an escape route for refugee traffic. In all, 1,196,547 refugees have fled through West Berlin compared to 991,888 to West Germany.

The East German regime is understandably eager to close this avenue of escape. It has failed to stop the flood of refugees by persuasion, threats and punitive legislation. Its best hope of maintaining its dwindling population now seems to be to close West Berlin as an escape route.

#### Number of Refugees

From 1945 to 1948, refugee authorities estimate that one million East Germans received permission to reside in West Germany. The following table shows the refugee flow since 1949, broken down by year and by place of entry. Since a small number of refugees do not register but go directly to the care of family or friends in the West, the total emigration is slightly higher than the figures indicate.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>West Berlin</u>	<u>Federal Republic</u>
1949-51	492,681	189,666	303,015
1952	182,393	128,906	53,487
1953	331,390	297,040	34,350
1954	184,198	94,517	89,681
1955	252,870	133,291	119,579
1956	279,189	139,745	139,444
1957	261,622	111,005	151,617
1958	204,092	103,377	100,715
	2,188,435	1,196,547	991,888
1959			
Jan	13,142	6,430	6,712
Feb	10,072	4,694	5,378



The peak year, 1953, during which over 300,000 persons fled the Soviet Zone, reflects the reaction to the June uprising and its suppression by the Soviets. The shortage of food and consumer goods and the workers' dissatisfaction with the increase in work norms, both of which reached an acute stage with the June revolt, also contributed to the increase in the refugee flow.

Significantly, the repressive measures adopted by the regime to halt or at least diminish the draining away of the population have had little effect. After the uprising of 1953, the Zone authorities stiffened the border between the two parts of Germany with barbed wire, border police and a strip of plowed ground 10 meters wide. These precautions, plus propaganda and indirect pressure, did not succeed in stopping the flight. In December 1957 the East German regime passed laws providing sentences up to three years imprisonment at hard labor for those who attempt to flee and are intercepted. Friends and relatives who help refugees in any way are subject to the same penalties. Passports and travel permits have been made more difficult to obtain, particularly for those whose relatives include a refugee. In Berlin, controls at subway stations and crossing points have been tightened. The effect has been negligible. The refugees continue to stream out of East Germany at the rate of 700 a day, 5,000 a week, a quarter of a million a year.

#### Composition of Refugee Flow: Occupation

An analysis of the refugee flow by occupation shows at once why the East German regime has gone to such lengths to attempt to stop it. Over the past five years 62 percent of all refugees, or 733,750 persons, have been part of the East German labor force. The following chart shows the breakdown by occupation according to the figures of the West German Refugee Ministry for the period 1954-1958:

Refugee Breakdown by Occupation  
(in percent of total applications for admission)

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>1954</u>	<u>1955</u>	<u>1956</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1958</u>
Farmers	6.8	6.0	6.2	6.0	4.5
Industry and handicraft	20.5	23.9	21.5	23.6	19.3
Technical occupations	1.5	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.2
Occupations in trade and traffic	10.8	12.3	12.0	12.0	11.7

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>1954</u>	<u>1955</u>	<u>1956</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1958</u>
Domestic and health services	5.3	4.7	4.7	5.2	5.8
Administration and law	2.4	2.6	3.5	3.3	4.4
Intellectuals and artists	1.6	1.6	1.4	1.4	2.6
Unidentified occupations	11.7	9.7	10.0	11.0	10.0
Labor force	60.6	62.9	61.1	64.6	60.5
Pensioners	5.0	5.4	5.4	5.8	6.7
Housewives	12.3	11.5	12.4	10.0	11.3
Children and students	21.6	20.5	20.6	18.9	20.2
Students beyond high school	0.5	0.7	0.5	0.7	1.5
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The loss of skilled industrial workers who make up the largest single group totaling almost 300,000 persons, has been a serious blow to the East German economy, which in accordance with Soviet requirements, has placed its greatest emphasis on industrialization, particularly heavy industry. The slow rate of growth of the East German economy during the past several years is due at least in part to this decline in the most productive sector of the labor force.

The most significant development during 1958, however, was the increase in the number of intellectuals and professional men who fled the Soviet Zone. The total rose from 7,051 in 1957 to 9,665 in 1958, an increase of 37 percent. The following table gives a breakdown by profession for the years 1954-1958:

**Number of Refugees in Specific Professions  
(Applicants for Emergency Admission, 1954-58)**

<u>Profession</u>	<u>Total 1954-58</u>	<u>1954</u>	<u>1955</u>	<u>1956</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1958</u>	<u>Percent increase 1957/58</u>
School teachers	12,600	2,045	2,720	2,453	2,293	3,089*	35
University professors and assistants	393	28	56	43	58	208**	259



<u>Profession</u>	<u>Total</u> <u>1954-58</u>	<u>1954</u>	<u>1955</u>	<u>1956</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1958</u>	<u>Percent</u> <u>increase</u> <u>1957/58</u>
Students (be- yond high school	8,561	879	1,835	1,431	1,894	2,522	33
Doctors (incl. physicians, dentists, vet- erinarians	2,763	270	344	467	440	1,242	182
Engineers and technicians	11,298	1,610	2,475	2,672	2,196	2,345	7
Lawyers	693	234	157	156	71	75	6
Pharmacists	<u>625</u>	<u>109</u>	<u>108</u>	<u>125</u>	<u>99</u>	<u>184</u>	<u>86</u>
Total	36,933	5,175	7,695	7,347	7,051	9,665	37

\* Of this total 1,044 were "old" teachers and 2,045 "new" teachers (i.e., trained after 1945).

\*\* Of this total 109 were "old" professors and 99 "new" professors (i.e., trained after 1945).

Although all categories rose in 1958 over the preceding year, the greatest increase was in university professors. The 208 professors and assistants who fled in 1958 are more than the total number who emigrated in the preceding four years. Dresden University alone lost 18 of its faculty in 1958. The increase followed the decision of the Fifth Party Congress of the SED in July 1958 to institute a more stringent Party program in education.

The 182 percent increase in the number of doctors (1,242 in 1958 as compared with 440 in 1957) is directly related to the policy enunciated at the Fifth Party Congress to increase communization and reduce private practice. Doctors also resented the bans on travel to attend medical conferences in the West. In September 1958 the regime was forced to announce concessions in an effort to stop the flow of physicians westward. Doctors were promised educational opportunities for their children, travel opportunities to the Free World and the continuation of private practice. A slight reduction in the number of refugee doctors followed this announcement but the monthly totals remained high. The result has been a shortage of doctors in the Soviet Zone. The ratio of doctors to the general population has fallen to 1 in 1,500 in contrast to West Germany where the ratio is 1 to 500.

The following table shows the breakdown by months in 1958 of four categories of professional refugees:

**Number of Refugees in Specific Professions  
By Month, 1958**

School teachers	University professors & assistants	Students beyond high school	Doctors (including physicians, den- tists, veterinar- ians)
(1957 monthly average) (191)	(5)	(158)	(38)
January 329	14	164	86
February 165	8	189	70
March 165	9	182	61
April 283	17	252	103
May 242	12	217	78
June 150	15	225	85
July 345	20	228	153
August 592	27	228	177
Septem- ber 280	18	332	139
October 289	32	250	139
November 152	17	161	94
December <u>97</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>94</u>	<u>57</u>
Total 3,089	208	2,522	1,242

**Composition of Refugee Flow: Age-Sex Distribution**

Consideration of the refugee flow by age and sex groups emphasizes the serious demographic situation which has developed in the East Zone. From 1954 until 1958, by far the largest number of refugees has been in the 25-45 year group (25.2 percent in 1958). The age groups 18-21 and 21-25 also have been consistently high (12 percent and 10.8 percent respectively in 1958). Together they total 48 percent, almost half of the total number of refugees.

Since the end of 1953, the Soviet Zone has lost 589,000 individuals in the working age group 18-44. The substantial proportion of youths in the emigration (18 percent in the 6-18 group in 1958) is a complete refutation of the regime's effort to convince the East Germans that the Communist system is the "wave of the future."

The sex distribution among refugees has remained fairly constant during the past five years. In 1958 the proportion of men among the refugees dropped to 45.9 percent from 51.8 percent in 1957. The average for the five-year period is 50.6 percent. Added to the distortion of the age-sex distribution caused by the war, this constant loss of male population leaves the Soviet Zone with a shortage of men and a population increasingly composed of women and old people.

The following table shows the refugee flow broken down by age and sex groups from 1954-1958:

Refugee Breakdown by Age  
(in percent of yearly total applications for admission)

	<u>1954</u>	<u>1955</u>	<u>1956</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1958</u>
Under 6 years	8.4	7.6	7.4	7.4	7.4
6 - " 14 "	12.6	9.8	10.1	9.1	9.9
14 - " 18 "	12.9	9.6	9.4	9.2	8.1
18 - " 21 "	8.5	14.6	11.8	14.8	12.0
21 - " 25 "	6.7	10.9	10.3	11.7	10.8
25 - " 45 "	29.4	27.0	27.4	26.2	25.2
45 - " 65 "	17.2	16.5	18.9	16.7	20.4
Over 65 "	<u>4.3</u>	<u>4.0</u>	<u>4.7</u>	<u>4.9</u>	<u>6.2</u>
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Male	51.2	52.2	52.4	51.8	45.9
Female	48.8	47.8	47.6	48.2	54.1

	0-17 incl.		0-24 incl.		18-44 incl.		45 years and older	
	%	Number	%		%	Number	%	Number
1954	33.9	(62,443)	49.1		44.6	( 82,152)	21.5	(39,603)
1955	27.0	(68,275)	52.5		52.5	(132,757)	20.5	(51,838)
1956	26.9	(75,102)	49.0		49.5	(138,198)	23.6	(65,889)
1957	25.7	(67,237)	52.2		52.7	(137,875)	21.6	(56,510)
1958	23.4	(51,839)	48.2		48.0	( 97,964)	26.6	(54,289)